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ABSTRACT

To test the relationship between school principals' level of ego development and their use of power bases, researchers surveyed principals and teachers in 70 schools in a southern urban area. Ego development levels were defined as either conformist or conscientious or a transitional conscientious-conformist level. Principals have seven power bases to rely on: rewards, coercion, legitimacy, others' feelings of "oneness" with the principal, expertise, information, and connections to powerful others. The 70 principals' ego development level was tested using the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test. A survey of 308 teachers in the 70 schools used the Richardson Power Profile, developed by the authors, to measure each principal's reliance on different power bases. Correlation of the results showed there were no statistically significant differences in the patterns of power base use by principals grouped according to levels of ego development. These findings indicate that principals are psychologically able to vary power base use depending on situational factors. (Author/RW)

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EGO DEVELOPMENT AND POWER BASE RELIANCE OF SCHOOL PRINCIPALS

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Paper presented at the annual meeting of the American Educational Research Association, New York, 1982. A more complete discussion of the theoretical framework and statistical results of the study can be found in: Richardson, Rita C. Ego development and power base reliance of school principals (Doctoral dissertation, University of New Orleans, 1981). Dissertation Abstracts International, 1981, 42, 2421A. (University Microfilms No. 81-25,886)

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Early philosophers (Burnet, 1930) recognized that an understanding of human behavior is partially predicated on an understanding of the use of "power" in human relationships. However, serious investigation of the power construct and its social consequences are fairly recent developments. As Gibson (1978, p. 118) notes, "administrators must understand fully the uses of power and authority because these two concepts are fundamentals of successful leadership."

Mowday (1978, p. 137) studied the use of power by school principals and found that "the likelihood of using manipulation as a method of influence was found to differentiate principals rated high in influence effectiveness from principals rated low with high effectiveness principals indicating they were more likely to use manipulation." However, appropriate forms of power use are not completely clearcut. As Garberina (1975, p. 3) notes, although it is generally agreed that principals are the primary authority figures in their schools, one should bear in mind that "conflict and tension can result when the principal ignores the teachers' needs for professional independence and defense against attacks on their informal authority."

Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer (1979) integrate the concept of power in their situational leadership theory. They suggest that administrators may rely on some combination of seven power bases when exercising influence: 1) reward power, based on the ability to reward; 2) coercive power, based on the ability to punish; 3) legitimate power, based on formal authority or position; 4) referent power, based on followers' feelings of "oneness" with the leader; 5) expert power, based on perception that an administrator possesses unique insight or expertise; 6) information power, based on access to information not generally available to

followers; and 7) connection power, based upon the administrator's ties with powerful others. Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer suggest that reliance upon different power bases should be varied in light of the maturity of an organization's followers; different forms of power should be used depending upon the group's willingness to accept responsibility, ability to set high but attainable goals, and the group's experience and education.

Of course, in addition to organizational needs, principals as people have needs too--these psychological needs may influence principals' uses of the various power bases. As conceptualized by Loevinger (1966), these psychological needs constitute a person's ego; ego can be investigated by observing specific areas of personality such as impulsiveness, conformity, self-criticalness, mutuality, empathy, and identity. Loevinger (1976), based upon empirical research, subsequently identified several phases or stages of ego development.

Although it seems reasonable to presume that personality as reflected in ego development may affect a principal's power base reliance, this possibility has not been investigated previously, possibly because the power bases identified by Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer (1979) nave only recently come to the attention of researchers. Thus this study was conducted to investigate how principals' ego levels may affect power base use.

The Study

Seventy principals from an urban area in the Southern United States participated in the study. There were 33 female participants and 37 male participants. Thirty-eight principals held a master's degree, 19 had earned 30

semester hours beyond a master's degree, and 13 principals held doctoral degrees. The principals completed the Loevinger Sentence Completion Test (LSCT) as a measure of ego development (Loevinger & Wessler, 1970). Previous research suggests that the LSCT is both a reliable and valid measure of ego development (Redmore, 1976).

Power base reliance was measured using an instrument developed by the authors, the Richardson Power Profile (RPP). A previous study (Richardson & Thompson, 1981) indicated that the RPP is a useful, reliable, and valid measure of power base reliance. In the new study reported here, seven teachers per school (n = 490) were randomly selected and asked to rate the power base reliance of the 70 school principals using the RPP. Three-hundred eight (63%) of the 490 randomly selected teachers returned the RPP.

The Results

The data derived from the LCST indicated that the largest number of the principals (31) were operating at what Loevinger has termed the "conscientious" level of ego development. This ego level is marked by a deep sense of responsibility, self-respect and concern for interpersonal relationships. As Loevinger and Wessler (1970, p. 5) explain, a person operating at this level "feels guilty not primarily when one has broken a rule, but when one has hurt another person." Twenty-five of the principals in this study were operating at the transitional ego level immediately below the conscientious level, i.e., the conscientious-conformist stage, and five principals were operating at the level immediately below the transitional conscientious-conformist stage, i.e., the conformist stage. However, nine principals were operating at higher stages than the conscientious stage.

Although Loevinger and Wessler (1970, p. 5) tell us that "people at the conformist stage constitute either a majority or a large minority in almost any social group," in this study all but five of the principals were operating at ego levels higher than the conformist stage. However, this finding was not entirely unexpected; promotion to the principalship is probably facilitated by perceptions that the job candidate is mature and sensitive to the needs of self and others.

The study was conducted primarily to to determine whether the ego development of principals affects power base reliance. In order to address this question the data were analyzed using a discriminant analysis statistical technique. The results of the analysis indicated that there were no statistically significant differences in the patterns of power base use by school principals grouped accroding to levels of ego development.

Conclusions

As indicated by previous research and by leadership theories, the use of power in its myriad forms by school principals can be an important factor in administrative effectiveness. Yet there is a paucity of research regarding what factors affect use of the various forms of power. This study was conducted to determine whether personality in the form of ego development substantially affects power base reliance. For example, principals at lower levels of ego development might be expected to be more punitive in their power base use. Thus the finding that ego development is not systematically related to perceived power base use is somewhat surprising.

Of course, it must be noted that the finding only means that for principals as a group ego level does not apparently mediate power base reliance; ego level may influence power use of a few individuals although it does not do so more generally. The situation may also be different for the limited number of principals who are operating at lower ego levels than the 70 principals who participated in this study.

Nevertheless, the study's results have important implications for situational leadership theories, such as the theory offered by Hersey, Blanchard, and Natemeyer (1979). These theories suggest that administrators should vary behaviors, including power base reliance, depending upon situational factors such as organizational maturity. The finding that ego levels of principals does not generally mediate power base use is important because the finding indicates that principals are generally psychologically able to vary power base use in light of situation-specific considerations. Thus the finding supports the feasibility of recently developed situational leadership theories.

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